

Faculty Center for Excellence in Teaching & Learning

Responses to "An Alternative to Program Deletion" by Duane Davis, 2/1/01

Although I suspect much of Duane's article is tongue-in-cheek, he makes some very good points about priorities and resources at WCU. But, what struck me most were two things. First, this comes from a member of the Strategic Planning Committee, and, second, it comes from a member of a department that stands to gain if smaller programs are cut. This debate has badly damaged or destroyed what some used to call a "community of scholarship." Duane's piece was a balm on a festering sore.

Gary White, Geosciences and Natural Resource Management

Duane's piece reminded me of something that occurred during my doctoral study. During one of our routine "bull sessions," our advisor/mentor presented the following two scenarios to a group of his minions.

1. It's Spring break. All campus administrators board an airplane and travel to a retreat in some northern hinterland. Shortly after they arrive, the blizzard of the century hits. The administrators are safe but completely snowed-in and unable to communicate with the outside world for three months.
2. It's Spring break. All faculty members board airplanes and travel to a workshop in some remote jungle. Shortly after they arrive, the flood of the century hits. The faculty members are safe but completely isolated and unable to communicate with the outside world for three months.

He listened as we discussed the scenarios (in the rambling, complex, competitive way that only highly enlightened doctoral students can do). Finally, he instructed us to identify which of the two sets of conditions he had posited would result in the immediate cessation of all teaching and learning activities and under which of the two circumstances teaching and learning could continue. Then he asked us which of the two groups was really the most important to the life of the university.

Walt Foegelle, Health Sciences

While reading Duane's recent opinion piece, I was reminded of a finding made in the mid-1970's by the Committee on Organization. During the Institutional Self-Study, done in conjunction with the SACS visitation, this committee discovered that there were, at that time, 17.5 faculty positions (other than those called for by the Table of Organization) devoted to administration. Subsequently, the university undertook a serious effort to work with General Administration to officially convert some of these positions to administrative positions and/or to consolidate some administrative functions so as to return other positions to teaching. But, however serious this effort was played out, the university eventually drifted back to using an increasing number of teaching positions for administrative functions. Currently, that number could be approximately double the percentage from the mid 70's, while enrollment has remained about the same.

As I look today at the faculty roster simply for the College of Arts and Sciences, the full-time and part-time positions that are devoted to administration total approximately 19. Some of these are called for by the Table of Organization while others are faculty positions being used for administrative purposes. Assuming a faculty-student ratio of 1 to 16, the removal of 19 positions from our effective teaching faculty drives that faculty-student ratio up to over 1 to 18. As Duane pointed out, this results in fewer faculty to share the teaching load; hence, larger classes. Specifically, for those faculty fortunate enough to teach four courses with an average enrollment of 16, the impact of the above shift

- - -Continue - - -

Responses to "An Alternative to Program Deletion," by Duane Davis, 2/1/01

in the faculty-student ratio is a gain of 8 students. For those who teach in departments where the average enrollment per course is closer to 32, the impact is a gain of some 16 students (a number equivalent to another course when the faculty-student ratio was 16).

As Duane also pointed out, the individual who moves from the faculty ranks to administration usually moves up to a higher salary. With salary increments computed in terms of percentages, these "new" administrators reap a higher gain in salary than those in the teaching ranks; and, over the years, some have felt that the salary money often times has been applied there first or applied there more liberally than to the teaching ranks.

Fact Book 2000 indicates that the faculty of the College of Arts and Sciences makes up forty-three percent of the total W.C.U. faculty. If the number of teaching positions being used as administrative positions is spread somewhat uniformly throughout the colleges, this would indicate that there are approximately forty-four teaching positions that are currently being used as administrative positions. Again, this number includes those called for by the Table of Organization as well as the "converted" teaching positions. Admittedly, I do not have access to all the data. If the numbers presented here are far off the mark, I will be the first to step back and admit my error in the face of the correct data. Perhaps the Office of University Planning can help us make a clear explanation of the current state of affairs.

Each administration, of course, has to decide how best to use its personnel resources to accomplish its specific goals and objectives. But however laudatory these administrative functions are toward the university's over-all mission, the administrative officers must continually strive for a balance and continually re-evaluate to determine the appropriate balance of administrative and faculty positions.

Ralph Willis, Mathematics and Computer Science

I'm impressed by Duane Davis' line of reasoning in his article last week. It reminds me of Jesus' statement about criticism. If the administrators are eager to remove the mote from the eye of all those unprofitable academic programs, then they probably ought to attend first to the beam in their own. Has the expansion of their ranks made their operation more profitable to anyone but themselves?

And is anyone looking at the profitability of our athletic programs?

Karl Nicholas, English